

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 5439

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, XO , AS, US

SUBJ: VISIT TO COCOS ISLANDS BY UN COMMITTEE OF 24

REF: CANBERRA 4526

1. SUMMARY: VISIT OF GROUP OF THREE REPRESENTATIVES OF UN COMMITTEE OF 24 (FROM IVORY COAST, INDONESIA AND TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO) TO AUSTRALIA AND TO COCOS ISLANDS AUG 4-18 WENT OFF WITHOUT INCIDENT. MISSION VISITED COCOS AUG 8-11 AND HAD FULL OPPORTUNITY TO MEET MALAY POPULATION AND TALK TO THEIR LEADERS AND TO VIRTUAL "LORD" OF THE ISLANDS, JOHN CLUNIES-ROSS. MISSION LIKELY TO MAKE REPORT CRITICAL OF INADEQUACY OF AUSTRALIAN ADMINISTRATION. DFA TELLS US THIS WILL BE USEFUL TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN HIGHLIGHTING SHORT-COMINGS OF ADMINISTRATIVE SETUP. MARITIME RECONNAISSANCE FROM COCOS DID NOT COME UP DURING MISSION VISIT TO ILSNADS AND WAS RAISED ONLY ONCE DURING BRIEFING SESSION FOR MISSION IN CANBERRA. END SUMMARY.

2. VISITING MISSION FROM UN COMMITTEE OF 24 VISITED AUSTRALIA FROM
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AUGUST 4-18, SPENDING PERIOD FROM AUG 8-11 IN COCOS ISLANDS.

MISSION COMPOSED OF KOFFI KOUAME (IVORY COAST), MOHAMET SIDIK (INDONESIA), AND VINCENT LASSE (TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO). VISIT TO COCOS, IN INDIAN OCEAN NORTHWEST OF AUSTRALIA, WAS PURPOSE OF MISSION'S VISIT TO AUSTRALIA.

3. FOLLOWING BRIEFING IN CANBERRA AT DEPT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MISSION TRAVELLED TO COCOS, ACCOMPANIED BY C.R. ASHWIN (ASSISTANT SECRETARY, DFA DEFENSE POLICY BRANCH, CHOSEN BECAUSE HE WAS FORMER DEPUTY AUSTRALIAN PERM REP AT UN), CLAUDE RESEIGH (ASSISTANT SECRETARY, DEPT OF SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE, WHICH IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ADMINISTRATION OF COCOS), AND JAMES DIXON, MANAGER OF CLUNIES-ROSS ESTATES ON COCOS. THREE COCOS ISLANDS "HEAD-MEN," IDENTIFIED SIMPLY AS CREE, FEYREL, AND ALPEN, ALSO ACCOMPANIED MISSION TO COCOS.

4. ASHWIN REVIEWED VISIT WITH EMBOFF AUG 19. HE COMMENTED THAT MISSION MEMBERS HAD OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT HOME ISLAND (WHERE PREDOMINANTLY MALAY POPULATION LIVES) AT SOME LENGTH, WITH INDONESIAN-SPEAKING OFFICER FROM AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY JAKARTA INTERPRETING FOR THEM. JOHN CLUNIES-ROSS, WHOSE GRANDFATHER ORIGINALLY SETTLED COCOS UNDER A GRANT FROM QUEEN VICTORIA, PLAYED HIS ACCUSTOMED ROLE AS LORD AND MASTER OF THE ISLANDS, TREATING THE MISSION WITH ALOOFNESS BORDERING ON CONTEMPT. ASHWIN COMMENTED THAT THE ATTITUDE OF THE MALAY RESIDENTS OF HOME ISLAND TOWARDS CLUNIES-ROSS WAS A COMPLEX ONE, COMPRISED OF A MIXTURE OF RESPECT, REGARD, AND AN ELEMENT OF FEAR. MISSION AND AUSTRALIAN ESCORTS STAYED ON WEST ISLAND, WHERE AIRSTRIP IS, TRAVELLING OVER TO HOME ISLAND TWICE FOR MEETINGS WITH THE 500 OR SO MALAY RESIDENTS AND WITH THE "COUNCIL", A CONSULTATIVE BODY CHOSEN FROM AMONG THE MALAYS BY CLUNIES-ROSS.

5. ASHWIN COMMENTED ON CONTRAST BETWEEN WEST ISLAND, WHERE POPULATION ENTIRELY COMPOSED OF WHITE AUSTRALIANS, SOME 130 IN NUMBER. ROADS ARE LIKE ROADS IN AUSTRALIA, SHOP ASSISTANTS ARE AUSTRALIANS, ALL ARE NOTICEABLY FAT. BY CONTRAST, MALAY RESIDENTS OF HOME ISLAND ARE SLENDER, LIVE IN TRADITIONAL, COCONUT PALM SETTING, WITH DIRT ROADS AND CUSTOMARY SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS. TWO ISLANDS ARE AS DIFFERENT AS TWO WORLDS, THOUGH THEY ARE ONLY ABOUT 10 MILES APART, ON OPPOSITE SIDES OF MAIN LAGOON.

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6. ASHWIN SAID HE ANTICIPATED THE MISSION REPORT WOULD BE A CRITICAL ONE. HE SAID THIS MAY BE USEFUL TO DFA, WHICH WANTS TO SEE CHANGES OCCUR IN COCOS BUT HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO GET GOA INTERESTED IN ISSUE. MISSION HAD NOT RPT NOT SOUGHT TO STIMULATE INTEREST IN SELF-GOVERNMENT OR INDEPENDENCE BUT WAS CLEARLY NEGATIVELY IMPRESSED WITH PATERNALISTIC, AUTOCRATIC ATTITUDE OF CLUNIES-ROSS. ASHWIN ANTICIPATED MISSION WOULD RECOMMEND SEPARATION OF CLUNIES-ROSS ESTATE ENTERPRISE, ON WHICH MOST OF THE MALAY

POPULATION IS EMPLOYED IN PRODUCTION OF COPRA, AND ADMINISTRATION OF HOME ISLAND. HE ALSO ANTICIPATED THAT MISSION WOULD CONCLUDE THAT MALAY POPULATION, AS THEY ARE AT PRESENT, IS NOT ABLE TO MAKE A CONSIDERED JUDGMENT ON THEIR POLITICAL FUTURE. ASHWIN COMMENTED THAT MISSION HAD NOT HANDLED ITSELF WITH ANY GREAT SKILL IN CONVERSATION WITH MALAY VILLAGERS, REFERRING TO THE UN AND THEIR POLITICAL STATUS IN TERMINOLOGY THAT WOULD BE UNFAMILIAR TO THESE ISOLATED PEOPLE.

7. ASHWIN COMMENTED THAT INDONESIAN REP, MOHAMET SIDIK, HAD SPOKEN TO MALAY POPULATION AND MENTIONED TO ASHWIN THAT THEY USED MANY WORDS OF JAVANESE ORIGIN. HOWEVER, SIDIK CLEARLY HAD COMMUNICATIONS PROBLEMS, A MATTER WHICH WAS SOMEWHAT OF A SURPRISE TO HIM. (REASON MAY HAVE BEEN DIFFERENCES OF EDUCATION, RATHER THAN FUNDAMENTALLY LINGUISTIC DIFFERENCES. ISLANDERS DO NOT HAVE EDUCATION BEYOND SIXTH GRADE LEVEL, AND THEY LEAD VERY ISLOATED LIFE, OUT OF TOUCH WITH MOST WORLD DEVELOPMENTS.)

8. ASHWIN SAID THAT DEFENSE SIGNIFICANCE OF COCOS HAD NOT COME UP AT ALL DURING VISIT OF MISSION TO ISLANDS, THOUGH HE HAD OFFERED TO DISCUSS WITH MISSION AUSTRALIAN POLICY IN THIS CONNECTION. DURING BRIEFING OF MISSION IN CANBERRA, THERE WAS ONE QUESTION BY MISSION ON RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS FROM COCOS. DFA OFFICER (GRAHAM FEAKES, FIRST ASST SECRETARY, SOUTH ASIA DIVISION) HAD EXPLAINED THAT AUSTRALIA REGARDED SUCH FLIGHTS AS CONTRIBUTING TO PEACE AND STABILITY OF INDIAN OCEAN AND THAT AUSTRALIA SAW NO CONFLICT BETWEEN FLIGHTS AND AUSTRALIAN SUPPORT FOR INDIAN OCEAN ZONE OF PEACE. ASHWIN SAID HE DID NOT RPT NOT ANTICIPATE THAT RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS WOULD BE MENTIONED IN REPORT OF MISSION.

9. IN CONVERSATION WITH CHARGE AUG 14 MISSION MEMBERS EXPRESSED SURPRISE AT EXTENT AND DEPTH OF CLUNIES-ROSS' FEUDAL CONTROL OF MALAY POPULATION. THEY NOTED THAT POPULATION IS SHELTERED FROM

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OUTSIDE WORLD AND HAS LITTLE NOTION OF HUMAN LIBERTY. THEY COMMENTED THAT EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IS NOT ADEQUATE. KOUAME AND SIDIK SAID THAT, IN FAIRNESS TO CLUNIES-ROSS, THEY WOULD HAVE TO DESCRIBE HIS AUTOCRACY AS "BENELOVENT" OR "BENIGN," AS HE IS CONCERNED FOR THE WELL-BEING OF THE ISLANDERS. MISSION ALSO FELT THAT AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT PRESENCE AND AUTHORITY IN THE ISLANDS IS INADEQUATE. THIS ENCOURAGED AND PERHAPS EVEN OBLIGED CLUNIES-ROSS TO FILL IN VACUUM. SUCH AUSTRALIAN ADMINISTRATION AS EXISTS IS LIMITED ENTIRELY TO WEST ISLAND, THEY NOTED.

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